

## THE SHARING ECONOMY AND THE USE OF THE AIRBNB PLATFORM IN SLOVAKIA

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### **Abstract:**

*Research background:* The sharing economy operates on the principle of connecting demand and supply via the Internet. It enables cooperation that would not otherwise take place and contributes to increasing well-being in society without producing anything new. Goods and services are provided by households and ordinary people, not by entrepreneurs and companies. By using information and communication technologies, this form is highly available, flexible, and easy to use. Through a detailed analysis of theoretical aspects, we found that the topic of the sharing economy is broad and cannot do without healthy regulation. Through the available information, we have described the principles and operations of shared economy platforms. We paid special attention to the Airbnb platform, which is used by people for accommodation abroad and in Slovakia. People who own unoccupied or insufficiently occupied real estate usually decide to rent it. The main goal of the paper is to approximate the rental procedure using algorithms for classic private accommodation and through the sharing economy platform. Both methods are compared with each other and then economically and non-economically evaluated. The large differences in practices were due to the mismatch between private regulation of the sharing economy and public regulations. The rental of private accommodations is governed by state regulations, which require increased fees and lengthy processes even before the start of the rental and affect the amenities of the accommodation facility. On the other hand, renting through Airbnb is based on free registration, which is more affordable in terms of time and price. Accommodation prices are significantly lower and can provide unique experiences. On the other hand, private regulations do not enforce compliance with state laws, which can lead, for example, to non-compliance with the host's tax obligations. The sharing economy should be classified as a full-fledged form of economy.

**Keywords:** shared economy, comparative analysis, transaction models, landlord, online platform

**JEL Classification:** K11, P50, P19A

## 1. Introduction

The new economic model „the sharing economy” is characterized by non-exclusive ownership, temporary access, and redistribution of tangible or intangible assets. In addition, this model relies on the power of new information and communication technologies, which means that this form is highly available, flexible, and easy to use (Kathan et al., 2016). To increase the use of the property, it is necessary that it be easily accessible. Access can be achieved by using different transaction models (see Table 1). A transaction model is a system that characterizes asset ownership and its distribution from provider to customer (Botsman, 2015). Consumers are increasingly interested in participating in the peer-to-peer economy, trading with strangers with all the resources at their disposal (Liang et al., 2017). Peer-to-peer sharing requires a high level of trust between participants and plays an important role in achieving credibility and reputation on the Internet (Fremstad et al., 2017).

*Table 1: Comparison of transaction models*

Transaction models	Characteristics
<b>Business-to-business (B2B)</b>	Enterprises monetize and trade with their assets' free capacities.
<b>Business-to-consumer (B2C)</b>	Businesses own assets and facilitate transactions between users who share assets.
<b>Peer-to-peer (P2P)</b>	Personal property is directly distributed among individuals or groups of individuals.
<b>Peer-to-business-to-peer</b>	Assets owned by individuals are provided by existing businesses that offer them directly to other individuals as part of a wider offering.

*Source: own processing*

We can consider the concept of the "sharing economy" as a phenomenon of our time. With the development of this new form of management, the opinions of experts changed, which led to the formulation of the definition from different points of view. Stephany (2015) defines the sharing economy as follows: "The sharing economy means extracting value from unused assets that are made available via the Internet to the community, which reduces the need to own these assets. Chovanculiak (2016) notes that the sharing economy and its online platforms introduced people to the real amount of their own capital and working opportunities that they had not even considered before. It points to the transformation of unspent consumer goods into a beneficial asset that will allow the demands of others to be appeased. From the point of view of economics, the shared economy represents getting closer to the holy grail of economists in the form of the so-called Pareto optimum. "This is the state when all mutually beneficial exchanges are carried out and there is no room left in society for a change that would help at least one person and not harm anyone. Botsman and Rogers (2010) in their book focus on shared consumption, which includes traditional sharing, bartering, renting, lending, exchanging, and gifting through new technologies. "Shared consumption allows people to enjoy the huge benefits of access to ownership of products and services while saving time, space, money, building friendships, and becoming active citizens."

In recent years, the sharing economy has become a common practice in many areas. Retail, accommodation, transportation, and IT are just some examples of sectors affected by this form. The expansion of these models significantly affects the rapid development of technologies (Mauri et al., 2018). Cohen and Kietzmann (2014) distinguish the forms of the shared economy in the area of passenger transportation into carsharing (car sharing), ridesharing/carpooling (ride sharing), and bikesharing (bicycle sharing). In recent years, carsharing has gained significant momentum, and currently there are approximately 600 different companies

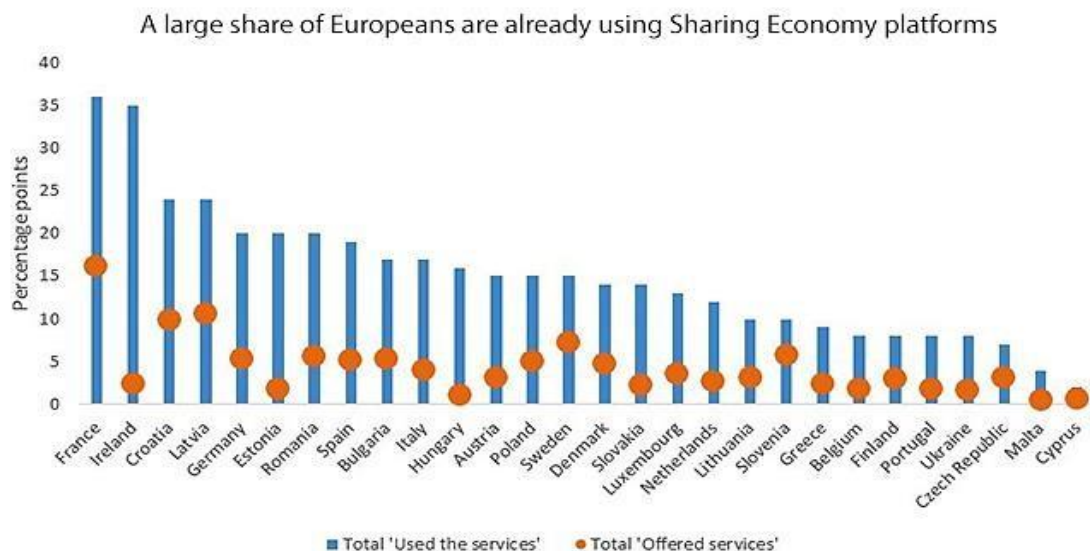
providing these services. The advantage of bike sharing over car sharing is that it requires less capital investment.

One of the alternative modes of transportation that is becoming increasingly popular is the bicycle sharing system (Kubalak et al., 2021). Bikesharing is most commonly used in cities, where it solves the problem of "last mile transportation." This includes transportation to locations that public transportation cannot reach (Hongyun et al. 2018). Bikesharing users are those who need to get somewhere. The user can be a tourist who, e.g., wants to see and visit the surroundings of the city, a student or worker who needs to get to school or work, residents from the neighborhood who do not have a bicycle with them, or residents of the center who do not have space to store a bicycle (Hartmannh, 2017). Bikesharing supports reducing the number of cars on the streets and thus helps to improve the traffic situation in cities. This reduces the number of accidents and increases traffic safety. Bikesharing is also environmentally friendly and has a positive impact on people's health (Kubalak & Gogola, 2021, Fishman, 2015, Willberg, 2021).

Through accommodation sharing platforms, providers can earn income by renting out their unoccupied spaces (Woskow, 2014). The sharing economy is largely mobile, meaning that some platforms are exclusively geared towards smartphone users (Ganapati, Reddick, 2018). Thanks to mobile applications, users can search for sharing economy services from anywhere at any time and the investigation of this issue is also the main aim of this paper.

A study by the World Bank in 2017 showed that the arrival of the sharing economy brought an opportunity for residents of the European Union to increase their income by providing services through the most well-known platforms, especially in the fields of transportation and accommodation. In countries such as France, Germany, and Latvia, at least one in ten adults uses platforms as a way of earning (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Proportion of Europeans using sharing economy platforms



Source: Winkler, 2017

The rapid rise of the sharing economy is pertinent in the context of adaptive and agile governance where public agencies are expected to adapt quickly to the environmental changes (Gong & Janssen, 2012, Janssen & Van der Voort, 2016, Mergel, 2016).

## **2. Methodology**

The main goal of the paper is to approximate the rental procedure using algorithms for classic private accommodation and through the sharing economy platform.

So that we can complete the main goal, we are interested in investigating the attitude of the inhabitants of Slovakia towards the sharing economy and the impact of the sharing economy on consumer behaviour. For that reason, we conducted the questionnaire survey. In order to reach the inhabitants, we have used social networks and e-mail. This helped us to consider and include all potential users who could use the sharing economy.

Some researchers have already compared the house price and the housing supply (Dow, 2011; Fuji et al., 2012). Other focused on the preferences in the peer-to-peer accommodation (Saraswat and Sisodia, 2022). Although there are many studies from abroad (Benítez-Aurioles, 2021, Silva, 2022), there is a lack of studies that would analyse this topic in the Slovak Republic. Other authors (Zhang and Jahromi, 2019) examined the factors that make the sharing economy successful. For that reason, we conducted the questionnaire survey in Google Forms. In order to reach the inhabitants, we have used social networks and e-mail. The contact methods used in the survey were social networks and e-mail. When determining the entire research set, we tried to take into account all users who could use the shared economy. Depending on the focus of the survey on accommodation services, we determined the number of domestic visitors in 2020 as the baseline. We drew the data from Tourism Statistics 2020.

The questionnaire contains 15 closed questions with options for choosing one or more answers. The questions are arranged in two circles. The first part is focused on gathering basic information about the respondent (gender, age and social status). The following part contains questions to determine general knowledge of the concept of the shared economy, its platforms and their use. At the same time, this section contains questions to collect information about the perceived pros and cons of using the platforms compared to classic providers of the given services and products. In the last part of the questionnaire survey, we focus on evaluating people's attitude towards short-term accommodation. It includes questions about knowledge and use of Airbnb, requirements for choosing accommodation and people's interest in renting.

We set these methods in order to obtain information from respondents of different age groups and different social statuses.

The article consequently describes rental procedures based on an analysis of individual laws in force in the Slovak Republic and within the EU and develops rental algorithms for classic private accommodation and through a shared economy platform. Algorithmic procedures can be depicted in many ways. It is important that we can remember what we recorded after a while and that others can understand our recording. In the post, flow diagrams were used, showing primarily the sequence of operations in individual steps during rentals.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

During the survey, which took place in January 2021, we sent out 270 questionnaires, of which 243 completed forms were returned. 139 women (57.2%) and 104 men (42.8%) participated in the survey.

The results of the survey showed that more than half of the respondents had not encountered the term "sharing economy," but nonetheless knew about and used its platforms. The most used platform is Uber, and the least known are platforms in the field of providing domestic work. According to the respondents, the shared economy offers cheaper services, represents an opportunity to increase your income, and is ecological. We paid special attention to the Airbnb platform, which is used by survey participants for accommodation abroad and in Slovakia. The

respondents' experience with this accommodation alternative is positive, and the result would be a recommendation to others.

Changing needs and circumstances of diverse urban populations produce new forms of rental accommodation and landlord–tenant relations (Scheba and Turok, 2020, Lonardoni and Bolay, 2016, Hilbrandt and Dimitrakou, 2022). It is also important that the state takes measures to regulate rent (Cooper, 2007, Peppercorn and Taffin, 2013, Domurath and Mak, 2020, Purnhagen, 2012, Comparato, 2017). In Slovak republic are large differences in practices were due to the mismatch between private regulation of the sharing economy and public regulations. The rental of private accommodations is governed by state regulations, which require increased fees and lengthy processes even before the start of the rental and affect the amenities of the accommodation facility. On the other hand, renting through Airbnb is based on free registration, which is more affordable in terms of time and price. Accommodation prices are significantly lower and can provide unique experiences. However, private regulations do not enforce compliance with state laws, which can lead, for example, to host tax evasion.

### **3.1 Proposal for the rental procedure in the private accommodation category**

Private accommodation is an activity that occurs when someone chooses to rent out their property for a short period of time. Private accommodation is a free trade, according to Act No. 455/1991 Coll. on the Trade Business. For this reason, a natural person must obtain a trade license.

According to Act No. 50/1976 Coll. on Spatial Planning and Building Regulations (Building Act), family houses and apartments belong to residential buildings. On the other hand, hotels, boarding houses, or other accommodation facilities for short-term stays are classified as non-residential buildings. Therefore, if someone decides to rent the property, he must report the change in purpose and use of the building to the building authority. At the same time, according to Act No. 355/2007 Coll. on the protection, support, and development of public health, it is necessary to submit an application for the inspection of premises intended for rent to the relevant regional office of public health. Subsequently, the building is approved, which makes it possible to use the building for a new purpose: renting.

The next step is the categorization of the accommodation facility according to Decree No. 277/2008 Coll. of the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, which establishes the classification signs for accommodation facilities when classifying them into categories and classes. There are three categories for private accommodation: room, object (a whole family house), or holiday home (a cottage). It is possible to assign a class to the given categories, where the lowest is marked with (\*) and the highest with (\*\*\*\*). This decree also sets general requirements for accommodation facilities and their equipment that must be met.

Each lessor is also obliged to meet the requirements such as heating, lighting, ventilation, and others, which are listed in Decree No. 259/2008 Coll. Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic on details on the requirements for the internal environment of buildings and on the minimum requirements for apartments of a lower standard and for accommodation facilities. This decree establishes the important task of developing an operating order with the necessary details. After writing down the operating procedure, it is also necessary to send a request for its approval to the relevant regional public health office. After approval of the operating procedure, it is possible to start renting the property.

The last step is the fulfilment of the obligation to notify the tax administrator of the creation of the accommodation facility and the creation of the tax liability according to Act No. 582/2004 Coll. on local taxes and the local fee for municipal waste and small construction waste, no later than 30 days after the tax liability, which begins on the day the rental was started. The tax

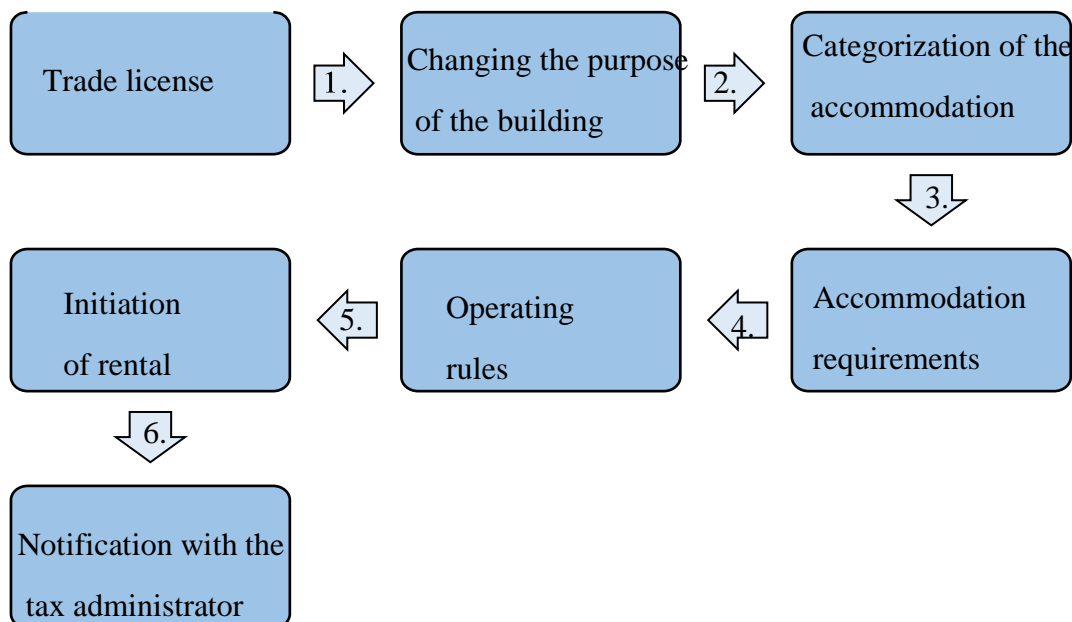
administrator is the municipality in whose territory the facility is located, the tax payer is the lessor, and the taxpayer is the person staying in the facility.

The lessor must keep a book of guests during the entire rental period. At the same time, according to Act No. 404/2011 Coll. on the Residence of Foreigners and on the Amendment of Certain Laws, there is an obligation to verify the identity of foreigners with information on nationality and date of birth and to deliver a report on the foreigner's residence to the police force within 5 days of accommodation.

The lessor, as a self-employed person, is obliged to pay social insurance according to Act No. 461/2003 Coll. on social insurance and health insurance according to Act No. 580/2004 Coll. on health insurance. The profit from the rental is taxed under Act No. 595/2003 Coll. on Income Tax.

The whole rental procedure is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Procedure for renting - private accommodation



Source: own processing

### 3.2 Proposal for the rental procedure via Airbnb

Anyone interested in renting a room through Airbnb must first register at [www.airbnb.com](http://www.airbnb.com). Subsequently, he chooses the option "Become a host" and registers his offer. Registering for the offer does not take much time and is free.

The first step is to provide basic information about the accommodations. The host chooses the type of accommodation (house, apartment, guesthouse with breakfast, etc.). He must also state whether he rents the entire building, only a specific room, or the guests will share the premises. Next, you need to fill in additional information about housing: the number of rooms, bathrooms, furniture, and equipment. It is important to state the address and locate the object on the map.

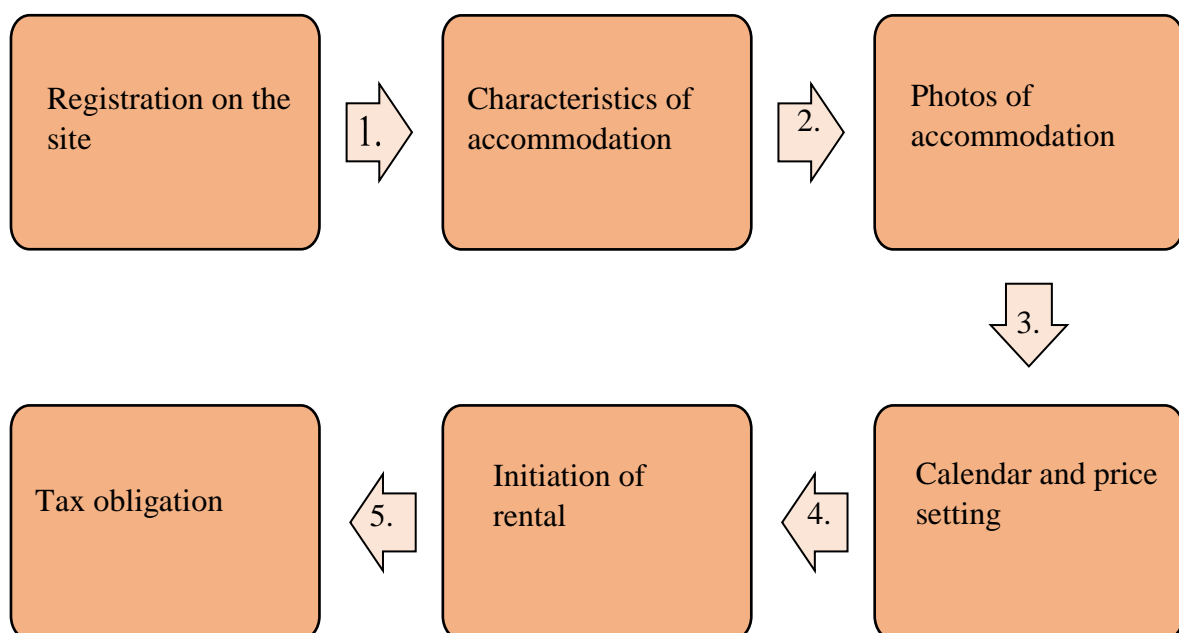
The next step is to publish photos of the accommodations. The host can publish their photos or use the paid services of a professional photographer who will take photos of the accommodation according to Airbnb's requirements. The fee depends on the number of photos and is paid from the payment for the accommodation of the first guest. After posting photos, it

is mandatory for the host to also post their own photo, phone number, and upload a copy of personal documents.

Airbnb investigates the truth and verifies the hosts' identities and photos. In addition to the basic requirements, each landlord determines his own requirements and rules that guests must meet. The basic requirements are the submission of an email address, a valid phone number, and payment information. For the offer to be valid, the host must publish a calendar with the dates when he offers accommodation. The publication of the price for accommodation is also essential. The host can change the price and can also provide various discounts (weekly, monthly, depending on the length of stay). Airbnb requires accommodation providers to review the non-discrimination policy and advises hosts to comply with the rules and laws of their cities and countries. After confirming familiarity with the given regulations, the accommodation offer is published and available to the public.

Providing temporary housing without the need for taxation is another stimulus for this modification of platforms by the state. At the beginning of 2018, the Ministry of Finance in Slovakia adopted an amendment to the law on income tax that focuses on hosts and other people providing services through digital platforms. This amendment establishes the obligation to tax income from operating platforms in Slovakia. If this establishment is located outside the territory, the state transfers this obligation to the providers of the given platforms. Taxes are paid through the withholding tax regime in the form of 19% (according to the contractual relationship with certain states, to avoid double taxation) or 35% of the fee collected by the foreign company. In the case of renting through Airbnb in Slovakia, hosts are obliged to pay income tax. Since the beginning of 2018, another task has been added to the hosts, which was brought about by the amendment of the Income Tax Act. This amendment requires a foreign company, in our case Airbnb, to have a registered office in Slovakia and to tax its income there. Since this fact is not fulfilled, the host must tax the commission he pays to the company (from 3% to 5%) with withholding tax (Lukacovicova, 2018). The entire rental procedure is shown in Figure 3.

*Figure 3: Airbnb rental process*



*Source: own processing*

### 3.3 Economic and non-economic evaluation

Registering accommodations through Airbnb is simple and completely free, and the process can take only a few hours for the host. On the other hand, renting in the form of private accommodation is associated with certain basic fees (see Table 2). The process itself depends on the fulfilment of the necessary conditions, the obtaining of the necessary permits, the inspection of the accommodation facility, and the start of the rental, which can take several months.

*Table 2: Fees associated with rental permits - private accommodation*

Fees	Price
Business license - free trade	5 €
Application for approval	30 €
Application to the regional office of public health (inspection of the premises)	50 €
Application for approval of operating rules	50 €

*Source: own processing according to Act no. 145/1995 Coll. about administrative fees*

Airbnb gives hosts the freedom, space, and imagination to create their listings. This means that the hosts do not have prescribed conditions for how the accommodation facility should look. Each offer is unique, which allows guests to feel at home and get to know the landlord's taste and personality. Private accommodations, on the other hand, require the lessor to incur expenses related to the necessary equipment and equipment of the accommodation premises. For example, the room must have a table, a mirror, a glass of water, and a wardrobe with four hangers. As for the entire object, for example, cleaning preparations and means, kitchen utensils, or even a refrigerator (category \*\*\*), must be available.

Another advantage of publishing an offer through a given sharing economy platform is that it saves time and money on advertising and raises awareness among potential guests. Proof of the growing popularity of Airbnb is the number of hotels that use this site to promote their accommodations.

Strict state regulations for short-term rentals put landlords at a significant disadvantage, especially with mandatory inspections. The landlord must expect up to two inspections from the regional public health office. The inspector visits the object for the first time during the new approval of the building, and when the operating procedure is approved, the inspection is called again. When renting through Airbnb, the company verifies both hosts and guests (for example, it verifies phone numbers and payment information). After the offer is published, the activities of the landlords are regulated mainly by the evaluation of satisfied or dissatisfied guests. These ratings are public and visible to all, which increases the efforts of hosts to improve services and eliminate possible shortcomings. In addition, hosts communicate with potential guests before making a valid reservation, which allows them to get to know them better and possibly prepare a surprise for them that they will definitely appreciate in the final evaluation.

Every host is automatically insured after posting an offer. Airbnb guarantees hosts up to a million dollars in insurance in the event of damage to their property dollars in insurance in the event of damage to their property. When renting in the private accommodation category, it is up to the lessor to insure his property at his own expense.

Accommodation through the peer-to-peer platform Airbnb is in many cases cheaper by almost half, as evidenced by our price comparison. We compared offers on the Airbnb website and private advertisements for short-term private accommodation in an apartment in Bratislava that met the following criteria: detailed photos of the premises, room for 2 guests, kitchen,



bathroom, toilet, location near the city centre, and wireless Internet connection. The average price per night via Airbnb was almost half as low as for private accommodation offers (see Table 3).

*Table 3: Comparison of accommodation prices via Airbnb and privately in Bratislava*

Airbnb		Private accommodation	
Offer number	Price per night	Offer number	Price per night
1.	20 €	1.	43 €
2.	30 €	2.	34 €
3.	22 €	3.	30 €
4.	25 €	4.	45 €
5.	16 €	5.	50 €
Average price	22,60 €	Average price	40,40 €

*Source: own processing*

The main disadvantage of renting through the Airbnb platform, according to us, is the change in income tax law. Airbnb does not have its headquarters in Slovakia; therefore, the lessor has an obligation not only to tax his income but also the commission applied by the company.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This paper analyses the differences between traditional accommodation services for customers and the sharing platform Airbnb. We have identified the interesting insights. Large differences in the given procedures were caused by the mismatch between private regulation of the sharing economy and public regulations. Renting private accommodation is governed by state regulations, which require increased fees and lengthy processes even before the rental begins and affect accommodation facilities. On the other hand, renting through Airbnb is based on Free registration, which is more affordable from a time and price point of view. Accommodations are significantly lower and can bring unique experiences. But private Regulations do not enforce compliance with state laws, which can lead to, for example, the hosts' failure to meet their tax obligations.

The sharing economy is currently a frequently mentioned topic. People are trying to find alternatives to make life easier, be it in travel, accommodation, or matters of finances. The sharing economy continues to grow, attracting an increasing number of product and service providers. The number of people interested in this new form is also increasing. The motivation to lend becomes stronger, ownership changes to co-ownership, transaction costs are reduced, people gain additional income, and they learn to live more ecologically. Not only should the shared economy's positive aspects lead to its inclusion among full-fledged forms of economy. However, this will not be possible until there are changes in state regulation so that the shared economy does not represent an enemy for traditional providers but becomes a legitimate alternative. We know that these services are mainly preferred by customers who expect a lower price compared to classic hotels. However, there may also be other factors such as the accommodation in the household, which is perhaps more similar to the accommodation of the customers themselves. They may also prefer more privacy compared to hotels, which are often aimed at a larger number of clients. These remarks also represent the limits of the study. Another limitation of the study consists in the fact that we do not have real data on the use of Airbnb by customers in Slovakia. These data could reveal several trends that the sharing economy offers. In addition, for the selected region, we would like to analyse customer

preferences in more detail and categorize them according to the selected preferences. This, therefore, represents a target for future research that we would like to focus on.

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